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SUBJECT: DIE LINKE ARE HERE TO STAY

REF: HAMBURG 035

11. (SBU) Summary: On November 6, EUR/AGS Deputy Director Bryant Trick and ConGen Hamburg Pol/Econ Officer Genevieve Libonati met with state party leadership from both the leftist Die Linke party and the Green party in Bremen. Die Linke is optimistic about its growth prospects; Greens leaders concurred. End Summary.

The Left Party: Bremen Not a Fluke

12. (SBU) Die Linke Bremen Director Andreas Hein and Deputy Chair of the Bremen Party Board Michael Lassowski discussed the party's continued growth in Bremen, noting that local membership has grown to approximately 450 people -- a 90 member increase over the past year. They lamented, however, that only about 25 percent of their members are under 30 and that the majority of party members were men, thus making it difficult to reach their 50 percent quota for women in party leadership positions.

13. (SBU) Lassowski predicted that after the 2009 elections Die Linke would have a strong enough presence in "Western" states to form governing coalitions and implied that the party stood excellent chances in Saarland, National Party Chairman Oskar Lafontaine's home state. Both Hein and Lassowski expected the party to enter the Hamburg and Hessen state parliaments in 2008.

However, Hein asserted that the party needs to obtain more political experience before becoming a coalition partner. He stated that Die Linke wanted to avoid being exploited by its coalition partners, as had occurred between the PDS and SPD during the first years of the Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern coalitions. Hein maintained that "East German" PDS party leadership has been sharing best practices with "Western" party members. Hein and Lassowski predicted the SPD would end its rejection of coalitions with the Linke in Western states or at the federal level within four years.

14. (SBU) Locally, Hein explained that the party's key goals in Bremen now that they were in parliament were to pass a strong minimum wage and protect benefits for the unemployed. Hein and Lassowski emphasized the party's firm opposition to foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr, but also said Die Linke "is a peace party, but not a pacifist party," clarifying that the party could support Bundeswehr involvement in traditional UN blue helmet peacekeeping missions, as long as the deployment did not include any combat operations..

The Greens: Ready to Govern Again

15. (U) In a conversation with Greens Bremen Caucus Leader Matthias Gueldner and Party Director Felix Holefleisch about climate change, the economy, and foreign policy, the party leaders criticized the party's indecisiveness about the deployment of German troops in Afghanistan.

¶6. (SBU) Gueldner agreed that the German political system is developing into a five-party system and that eventually Die Linke will assume a more active role in governing. He confirmed the Die Linke's potential of entering the Hamburg and/or Hessen state parliaments in upcoming elections. Gueldner and Holfleisch strongly emphasized, however, that the Green party has no intention of ever forming a coalition with Die Linke and emphasized that the Greens identify themselves more as liberals, and certainly not as leftists. Both politicians postulated that with Die Linke on the political scene it will become more difficult for the SPD or CDU to lead only two-party coalitions and that three-party alliances may soon dominate the governmental landscape. Gueldner asserted that the Greens are well positioned to lead and expected the Greens to have their choice of coalition partners in Hamburg depending upon which numerical combination is more advantageous.

JOHNSON